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SUBJECT: NOTES

11. Summary: Following a recent rise in attacks on the Jewish population in the Swedish city Malmo, comments made by Mayor Ilmar Reepalu, a leading figure in the opposition Social Democrats, have caused a ruckus in national media. Reepalu has been interpreted as

blaming the escalation of anti-Semitic harassment on Sweden's Jews themselves, because they did not take a clear stand against Israel's incursion into Gaza last winter. Social Democrat leader Mona Sahlin finally spoke out February 25, telling reporters that Reepalu's comments were "unfortunate" and that she had asked him to open a dialogue with Malmo's Jewish leaders. End Summary.

12. The regional paper Skanska Dagbladet ran a series of articles on anti-Semitism in January, in which Reepalu was quoted as saying that he opposes all forms of extremism, from Zionism to anti-Semitism. He reportedly also said that Malmo's Jews bore part of the responsibility for attacks against the community because they failed to criticize strongly Israeli actions in Gaza last winter. Reepalu subsequently claimed he was deliberately misquoted. However, in a February 21 article in the UK's Sunday Telegraph titled "Jews leave Swedish city after sharp rise in anti-Semitic hate crimes," Reepalu reportedly stated, "There have been no attacks on Jews, and if Jews here want to move to Israel, that is of no concern to Malmo."

13. In three recent editorials, national daily Svenska Dagbladet strongly criticized Mayor Reepalu for his statements. More opinion makers entered the debate, and on February 25, Social Democrat party leader Mona Sahlin finally weighed in. "There have been many examples of discrimination and attacks against Jews, not least in Malm. The Jews deserve strong support and also one must never mix up the debate about anti-Semitism and Zionism," Sahlin told journalists. "There are a number of unfortunate comments from Ilmar that came to be interpreted in that way," Sahlin commented, adding that she knows Reepalu well enough to know that it was not what he meant. "Ilmar is no anti-Semite but is someone who fights racism, and he also is against the attacks sustained by Jews in Malmo. I have asked him to open a proper dialogue with the Jewish community in Malmo in order to work things out," said Sahlin.

14. That same afternoon, Reepalu invited Fred Kahn and Fredrik Sieradzki from the Jewish community in Malmo to a meeting. Afterward, both parties said they were pleased with the outcome. "I think Reepalu gained a better understanding for the threats and harassments we are subjected to," said one Jewish community leader. For his part, Reepalu told newsmen that the suggestion he is anti-Semitic "are completely absurd." He indicated further that some sort of ongoing dialogue would commence.

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